

Town of Shelburne

Questions and Answers About Your Open Space Committee

Q. *What is the Open Space Committee?*

A. The Open Space Committee was established by Town Meeting in 2005 to carry forward the recommendations of the Shelburne Open Space and Recreation Plan. The Committee works with the Selectboard, Town Boards, other local, regional and state officials, regional farm and conservation advocacy organizations, members of the business community, landowners, farmers, and citizens on issues relative to open space preservation in Shelburne.

Q. *How is the Committee structured?*

A. The Selectboard appoints between five and eleven members for three year rotating terms, and the Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission, Planning Board, and Recreation Committee each appoint one of their members for a one year term.

Q. *What are the goals of the Open Space Committee?*

A. Key goals of the Open Space Committee are:

- To implement and update the Shelburne Open Space and Recreation Plan;
- To establish communications between the Town, land owners and others in regards to conservation and preservation of open space;
- To provide a forum for advancing issues related to open space in the Town;
- To make recommendations and advise Town Boards and committees regarding decisions affecting open space in Town.

Q. *What authority does the Open Space Committee have?*

A. None. The Committee is purely advisory.

Q. *Does the Open Space Committee diminish landowner rights?*

A. Absolutely not. In fact, one of the objectives of the Committee is to help keep farmers in business, and, should they wish to sell, help them attain full market value for their land.

Q. *What are some of the key accomplishments of the Open Space Committee?*

A. The Open Space Committee is working on the projects identified by the Town in the action plan of the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Selected activities include:

- Supported the development and implementation of a "Right to Farm Bylaw". By passing this bylaw, townspeople expressed their support for farming operations to continue in Shelburne.
- Created an Agricultural Commission, gained approval Town Meeting and launched the Commission for the purpose of helping to keep farms viable;
- Drafted procedures for the consistent handling of Chapter 61 lands by the Town and provided input on several parcels;
- Sponsored an educational forum on UMass CAPS mapping project;
- Created an Open Space Donation Account to receive private donations for the preservation of open space in Shelburne; created a flyer to promote the account.

Q. *What are some of the upcoming projects of the Committee?*

A. The Open Space Committee is continuing work on the following projects:

- Reviewing changes to Chapter 61 law to understand impacts on Shelburne landowners, and sponsoring educational sessions on the law;
- Drafting guidelines and criteria for evaluating natural resources in the Town;
- Developing educational materials regarding the etiquette and expectations of people who access lands open to the public.

Q. What are the goals of the Shelburne Open Space and Recreation Plan?

A. The Shelburne Open Space and Recreation Plan was developed by Shelburne citizens and approved by the Town in 2004 with three goals:

1. Ensure that Shelburne sustains its small town environment characterized by general peace and quiet, clean air and water, safety from crime and vandalism, and maintains its rural character outside of Shelburne Falls while supporting the infrastructure of the village.
2. Ensure that Shelburne maintains or improves the quality of its air, drinking water, streams and other surface waters including the Deerfield River, and maintains and improves the quality of farm and forestlands, scenic views, and wildlife habitat through the conservation of locally important natural and open space resources.
3. Ensure that Shelburne maintains and improves the quality and accessibility of all of its recreational facilities and programming.

The plan includes objectives for each of these goals, and a five year action plan.

Q. What is the definition of 'open space'?

A. Open space is defined as land that is undeveloped, generally without paved roads or permanent structures, which includes, but is not limited to, land to protect existing and future well fields, aquifers and recharge areas, watershed land, agricultural land, grasslands, fields, forest land, fresh water marshes and other wetlands, river, stream, lake and pond frontage, lands to protect scenic vistas, land for wildlife or nature preserve and land for active or passive recreational use such as the use of land for community gardens, trails, and noncommercial youth and adult sports, and the use of land as a park, playground or athletic field.

Q. Who 'owns' open space?

A. Open space in the Town of Shelburne consists of farms, forests, parks, and recreation areas under both private and public ownership and management. While we may all enjoy the beauty and peace that open space brings, most private land is still owned by individuals, and members of the public who enjoy open space should take care to respect the rights of private landowners, including not trespassing on land without permission.

Q. What techniques are used to preserve open space?

A. Many landowners use a variety of techniques such as covenants, Conservation Restrictions, Agricultural Preservation Restrictions and tax incentives, (such as Chapter 61) to preserve open space. Shelburne has over 8,000 acres of agricultural land, woodlands and open space in the Town with some level of protection from development.

Q. Why is open space important?

A. Residents of Shelburne recognize that the identification and conservation of open space are vital elements of the quality of life in our town, and understand that development in Shelburne must be balanced with the preservation of rural landscapes and ecosystems. The interdependence of active and inactive farmland, contiguous forests, open upland ridge-line views, streams and wetlands, scenic views, and significant historical structures and landscapes are essential to Shelburne's rural character.

We are stewards of these natural resources in the town, and to the extent we preserve and protect farms and open spaces, and focus development through careful planning, our children and grand-children for generations to come will still be able to enjoy the natural resources we do today.

Open space is a heritage, which, when lost to development, can never be recaptured. It is the privilege of the Open Space Committee to work with landowners as stewards of this heritage. We are grateful for the support of many townspeople committed to preserving open space, agriculture and the rural character of Shelburne, and to the many individuals who have contributed to the Shelburne Open Space Contribution Account this year.